

# THE FORGOTTEN INDIAN EARTHWORKS OF CLEVELAND, OHIO

by  
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The Cleveland region has rich prehistory that goes back over 11,000 years. On a less grand scale than the spectacular ruins in Southern Ohio, remains of Moundbuilder ceremonialism and mortuary ritual are common in Northeast Ohio. In fact the Cleveland region is one of Ohio's key archaeological areas for the study of the poorly known Late Woodland era (500 AD-900 AD).

The Allegheny Plateau, Central Till Plains and Great Lakes Plain meet in the Cleveland area. This geology could have been significant for the proliferation of human activity in this region in all eras. The eroding Allegheny escarpment has provided ready Paleozoic building material in the form of the Euclid Bluestone, Sharon Conglomerate, Berea Sandstone, and Cleveland Siltstone. Another geological feature that shaped human activity in the region is its position directly southeast of a large lake (Erie). Thus storms from the Northwest have battered the region since time immemorial, leaving precipitation that has carved its way into swift moving streams teeming with fish. Unbeknownst to many Northeast Ohioans today, the region is also strategically located on a continental divide; waters north of the so-called Great Bend in northern Akron flow ultimately into Lake Erie; those eight miles to the south in the Portage Lakes flow into the Tuscarawas River and ultimately into the Gulf of Mexico. This divide provided transportation advantages in this region from ancient times all the way up to the advent of railroads in the mid-19th Century.

The Ohio shore of Lake Erie was important in the Archaic period (7,000 to 1,000 BC). There have been more revealing Archaic findings in Northeast Ohio than interesting artifacts from later prehistoric Indians. Key Archaic developments in the region were commencement of atlatl or spear thrower use, and greater dependence on wild plants and fish in the diet of this pre-agricultural people.

Cleveland contains earthworks from all three major periods of the Woodland Era (700 BC to 900 AD). These consist of ceremonial earthen enclosures and Early and Middle Woodland burial mounds. At least twice as many Late Prehistoric ceremonial enclosures (900-1650 AD) as Woodland ones were found in Northeast Ohio, but none in Cleveland. Perhaps this was because the portion of the Cuyahoga River near Lake Erie in what's now Cleveland has been one of the least navigable area waterways.

The first earthworks mentioned in this study were unknown to all but Cleveland's earliest settlers. Some ambiguity surrounds

the authenticity of these relics. Their descriptions relied on the fading memories of Cleveland's founders when these individuals realized many years later that details of the city's early history might be something worth committing to writing.

Also, since these mounds of memory have never been examined for artifacts, it is possible that they were naturally occurring features and not constructed by human hands. This is not to say that there was not human activity in the Woodland period in what is now downtown Cleveland. The area's location at the mouth of a major river suggests that the area probably attracted humans in many eras. For example artifacts found in the vicinity of East Ninth Street, some mentioned in this study, support the existence of prehistoric inhabitants in what is Cleveland's downtown area.

## **An Indian mound at the mouth of the Cuyahoga**

According to early settlers a mound at the mouth of the Cuyahoga River was quite sizable, perhaps up to 150 feet in diameter and 75 feet tall. It was gradually lost after Clevelanders rechanneled the mouth of the Cuyahoga River too close to it. The rechanneling occurred in the 1820s as an infrastructure improvement for the simultaneous building of the Erie Canal. Before the rechanneling the mound was in fact not at the mouth of the river as pictured in the painting in FIGURE 1; the river mouth was around a mile to the west, at the terminus of what is known as the Old Riverbed. The painting, created for Cleveland's 1896 Centennial, depicts the rechanneled river directly east of the mound. The painting is based on a well-known woodcut of the same scene created at the time of the river's rechanneling or perhaps earlier. Occasionally prior to the rechanneling, during heavy storms, the river did jump its banks and surge toward the lake near the point of the later manmade bed.

There was at least one other Indian mound near what is now Cleveland's Public Square. It stood on what became Ontario Street, just south of Prospect Avenue. This point in our present-day is just east of Tower City Center and just west of the 19th Century Stanley Block, voted a Cleveland landmark in 2011. Isham Morgan, an original area settler, had a good view of the mound around 1812 when he rode on horseback to Cleveland with his father.

Morgan observed over a period of "several" years that the mound became levelled. He noted that in 1812 Ontario Street was in a forested region which stretched east, south and west. Ontario Street only ran

south of Public Square and even there, it was merely a path through woods. (Newburgh Township, four miles to the southwest, where Morgan then resided, was more developed; Cleveland in a comparative context was a clearing in the woods.) Thus in the early days of Cleveland not much disturbance came to the mound. As Cleveland transitioned from a little New England Village to an industrial center, the mound gave way to urban settlement. Its location is in the heart of the city's commercial activity.

## **"Ancient Newburgh Fort" (33Cu5) and mounds in Cleveland.**

Cleveland's most well-known Indian mound is one that over time has been flattened. It also has the distinction of before having been destroyed, never having its builders determined; no-one knows if they were Woodland or Late Prehistoric. The mound site, in the Slavic Village section of Cleveland, is appropriately marked by Mound School and Mound Avenue on the south. The site is approximately one city block bounded by Huss Avenue to the north and East 55th and East 59th Streets. Ackley Avenue, through to the major thoroughfare of Broadway, joins the block at a northeast angle. At the time of Whittlesey's writing the property with the mound belonged to Dr. H.A. Ackley. The area was still rural and non-incorporated until the early 1870s when the city's expanding Czech population gradually built up the Broadway/ East 55th Street area. An 1874 atlas of Cuyahoga County shows the Huss/ Mound/ East 55th Street block virtually as it still stands today. Undoubtedly the flattening of the earthworks, cliffs and ravines that accompanied the area's urbanization dates to the same time period. The 1881 City Atlas of Cleveland already shows nine houses or buildings on the block.

The main reference to the mound site is a mid 19th Century map by Charles Whittlesey. Whittlesey provided a few words of description to a similar Newburgh Township mound. This latter mound would have been near present-day Harvard and East 71st Street. The exact location has been lost, but because of the area's industrialization, nothing of the mound is thought to survive. Whittlesey noted that the mound was ten feet high in 1847 and quickly disappearing thereafter thanks to agriculture.

Another Newburgh prehistoric site well described by Whittlesey is now in Cuyahoga Heights, near the Cleveland Metroparks Ohio and Erie Canal Reservation. The site is atop a high bluff jutting out over the Cuyahoga River. It is thus surrounded by

water on three sides. Whittlesey named the Cuyahoga Heights enclosure Ancient Fort #2, Newburg. As with the two Newburgh Townships mounds, not a trace of the Cuyahoga Heights site remains. Like the other earthworks the Cuyahoga Heights site has never been analyzed and dated. Whittlesey noted the enclosure consisted of a single wall and trench on the land side. The trench had an opening. Another point of access was a narrow passageway along the southern portion of the ravine. These portals draw the site's function as a fort into question. More likely the site had a ceremonial purpose (FIGURE 2). Whittlesey noted in 1850 that only five feet of the wall's height remained, as the site had just recently come under cultivation.

#### **Early Woodland Period: 700 BC – 100 AD, and Moundbuilder Culture near Cleveland**

The Adena people who radiated outward from the Chillicothe, Ohio region had the highest Early Woodland mounds and most elaborate ceremonial culture. The tallest Adena mounds were over 70 feet and the widest 300 feet in diameter. Northeast Ohio's Early Woodland mounds are smaller.

It is important to note that not all Ohio Early Woodland burials involved mounds. Most Early Woodland burials in northern Ohio were not in mounds, but in oval earthen enclosures such as atop steep bluffs of a creek. Seaman's Fort in Erie County is a good example. There were also Adena burials of this type in southern Ohio and northern Kentucky. One good example is the Colerain Works near present-day Cincinnati.

An important trait of the Early Woodland Period in Ohio is the commencement of pottery in this region. It was mainly simple and thick walled. Such a pottery found in Northern Ohio that shows little Adena influence, is the Leimbach type named after the Leimbach archaeological site on the Vermilion River in Lorain County. Leimbach ware in Northeast Ohio exhibited cord marking on the outside.

The Leimbach ware also has massive crude rectangular lug-type handles not found on Adena pottery. Some archaeologists think the Leimbach ware's simple design reflects its utilitarian, nonceremonial nature as well as the fact that specimens were designed as single-use items. In contrast some Adena pottery was used for ceremonial purposes. Adena pottery such as Adena Plain and Montgomery Incised was sleeker and more stylized. Very little if any of this fancier pottery has been found in Northeast Ohio.

Most of the Early Woodland people in Northern Ohio were not Adena but other Moundbuilders. The Woodland people, Early, Middle and Late, occupied what became the Eastern United States. Most Early Woodland people did not participate in the Adena cultural revolution. For these non-Adena Early

Woodland people, life continued much as it had for centuries. Food continued to be procured by hunting and gathering if of a more sedentary type supplemented by rudimentary agriculture with squash and maygrass. Cultivation of maize was very limited though experimentation with it probably occurred. For Adena people there were some crucial lifestyle changes. Adena culture saw the beginning in Ohio of a true sedentary lifestyle based on agriculture.

#### **The Koth Cache (33Cu58) Valley View, Ohio**

Quantities of Adena artifacts with neither skeletons nor mounds have been found in Ohio wetlands. Such concentrations of material goods are called caches. These are usually found in boggy areas that may have been wetter in former times. Prehistoric people may have lowered items into the water for ceremonial purposes. Sometimes remains of the vessels which held the items are found with the cache.

Not far from Whittlesey's Fort #2 is the remarkably little known Koth Cache which yielded 150 Adena leaf shaped blades. The cache was found on high ground in the Cuyahoga Valley south of Tinkers Creek and east of the Cuyahoga River. The location is currently in the National Park, north of Alexander Road. At the time of the find, the 1930s, the area was described as boggy.

#### **Specific Early Woodland Mounds and Sites around Cleveland**

**Garlick Mound, 33Cu58, Cleveland, Ohio.** This mound was at the southeast corner of East Ninth Street and Euclid Avenue on the future site of the Wesleyan Methodist Church built in 1839. The site has been known since the first decade of the 20th Century as the location of the George Post-designed Cleveland Trust Company. Landowner Dr. Theodatus Garlick and his brother Abel partially opened the mound in 1820. A slate piercing tool and slate gorget were recovered.

**Gaylord Mound, (no OAI number) Cleveland, Ohio.** This was a mound at 374 Woodland Avenue, the 11 acre country estate of the Erastus Gaylord family. Erastus Gaylord came to Cleveland from Connecticut in 1834 and established Cleveland's first pharmacy Stickland and Gaylord. (Erastus perhaps is better known along with members of the Severance family, his neighbors on Woodland Avenue, as a founder of the Canal Bank, a troubled and dishonest Mid 19th Century financial house which served Ohio and Erie Canal shippers.)

In the late 1800s, a member of the Gaylord family retrieved from the mound an "Adena type" projectile point of eight inches in length. A summer 2010 archaeological investigation of the area in addition to historic relics, merely turned up unfinished prehistoric tools from local cherts. There was not enough information from the finds for temporal and cultural assignment.

The street number changes of 1905-1906 place the mound in the 3200 block of present-day Woodland Avenue. The mound's environs have been highly developed for the last 100 years. A gas station occupied the property from about 1922 to 1973. Directly to the east was the St. Ann's Maternity Hospital/ DePaul Infant Home. Since 1973 the site has belonged to Cuyahoga Community College and has comprised a park and recreation buffer zone between college facilities to the west and the dilapidated Longwood public housing complex on the east. From 2004 to 2009 Boca Raton's Finch Group tore down Longwood and launched a national award-winning innovation in public housing called the New Arbor Park Village. The mound site was under construction as of 2010 for a parking lot for nearby college buildings that are also under construction.

**Sawtell (Avenue) Mound, 33Cu6, Cleveland, Ohio.** This mound was located at East 63rd Street and Woodland Avenues. The part of Sawtell Avenue that it occupied no longer exists. The one block of the street that still remains is appropriately called Sawtell Court. The mound site is now part of the Ohio Food Terminal facility. An alley leading from Crayton Avenue to the vicinity of the mound site is fittingly named Indianola. A 19th Century viewer stated that the Sawtell Mound was five feet high, 40 feet long and 25 feet wide. Whittlesey and Judge C.C. Baldwin, also active in the Western Reserve Historical Society, opened the mound slightly in 1870. They found ornamental beads, copper rings, a spherical hematite gorget and a clay tube pipe (FIGURE 3). Andrew Freese, the owner of the land with the mound, did not want it disturbed at that time. The mound was finally opened entirely in 1909. The report of the mound's excavation did not take note of what was found, but said a few items were donated to the Western Reserve Historical Society.

**Collinwood Mound (no OAI #) Cleveland or Euclid, OH.** Although the exact location of this prehistoric work has been lost to time, a logical choice would be where St. Clair Avenue meets Euclid Creek. In 1851 when the Lakeshore Railroad was being constructed, a large tubular tobacco pipe-stem was found in the mound. It was in the range of three to eight inches long. A clay ball was found inside it. Consistent with this finding is the knowledge that smokers of clay tube pipes placed small pebbles and the like inside the pipes to keep the smoking materials from coming out.

Archaeologist MC Read, who first reported the Collinwood pipe, thought it was used as a horn. He tested his Collinwood find out as a horn and found it worked quite well. He also referred the reader to prolific archaeologist and naturalist Charles Conrad Abbott who had had similar experiences with like pipe-stems found in New Jersey. Abbott noted blowing on the pipestems he found would

produce a noise so shrill it could be heard for a good ways away. He then conjectured that Indians had used broken tobacco pipe-stems as sound signaling devices over vast distances.

**Holtkamp Mound, (33Cu78) Bentleyville, Ohio.** A Chagrin River Woodland site, though some seven miles east of Cleveland, deserves mention for its colorful history. This site, called Holtkamp, overlooks the Chagrin River just south of where the river's two branches split. The site was originally on Julius Kent's land, about 50 feet south of his residence. By the 1870s Martin Bentley owned the land. By the 1900s the Foster family had acquired the property. Today it abuts Cleveland Metroparks' South Chagrin reservation. The site consists of a mound that was opened in about 1840. Four stone unlidded coffins were found. One was child sized. The others were built for adults of larger size than the Indians that European settlers had encountered. Their large size and sophisticated stone technology fueled prominent 19th Century racist ideology. This theorized incorrectly that the Ohio moundbuilders were somehow related to the Egyptians or members of other great Eurasian civilizations, perhaps a lost tribe of Israel. Euro-Americans who held such notions were also likely to be among the large group of believers that historic Indians encountered by Europeans were indeed "savage" and had wiped out the Moundbuilders. The idea that the historic Indians were actually descended from the Moundbuilders struggled to find an audience in the early 19th Century. Crisfield Johnson, editor of the 1879 source detailing the large coffins, voiced the more modern opinion, that the Moundbuilders were in fact ancestors of historic Indians. This author however in his article also mentioned the competing idea that the Moundbuilders were an "advanced" group unrelated to historic American Indians.

Perhaps the reason that the mound was first opened in 1840 but only added to a regional history some 39 years later was that in 1878 another excavation was undertaken at the mound and written up in a local newspaper. This later dig revealed a fifth coffin and also banded slate gorgets and at least one projectile point. The Johnson article on the 1840 excavation mentioned no artifacts.

In the early 1900s prominent citizens Howard and Homer Foster attempted additional explorations at the mound site, but being superstitious types, curtailed their efforts only after a little digging; they thought they heard strange noises coming from the mound!! As of the 1970s the mound stood over eight feet high and 20 feet wide.

#### **The Middle Woodland Period: 100 BC - 700 AD, and Hopewell Mound Culture near Cleveland**

Before delving into the specifics of Hopewell Culture, it is necessary to point out that Hopewell culture was not the only

Middle Woodland culture in Northeast Ohio. However other Middle Woodland cultures, besides Hopewell, are hard to detect because life went on much as before. One such Middle Woodland, non-Hopewell site in Northeast Ohio is the:

**Huntington Road Site (33La160), Painesville Township, Ohio.** The site is on the north bank of the Red Creek just east of where the creek enters the Grand River. Chesser and Snyder projectile points were found. These were used by a number of Middle Woodland people besides the Hopewell. The pottery recovered from professional digging at Huntington was undecorated. The remains of vegetable matter were mainly nutshells. No evidence of the following prominent Hopewell traits were found:

- a) agriculture with emphasis on tobacco
- b) ample earthen enclosures of a more elaborate nature than Adena predecessors
- c) continent-wide trade networks
- d) a wider variety and more elaborate decoration in functional art including pottery

At least one Hopewell site has been found in Cleveland proper. A site discovered during sewer construction near the Cuyahoga Old Riverbed yielded a few Hopewell artifacts and a possible mound. The site's location near the original mouth of the Cuyahoga River would certainly have been a logical place for a mound. The rest of the Cleveland area Hopewell mounds are in the Cuyahoga Valley National Park.

#### **The Late Woodland Period near Cleveland: 500 AD - 900 AD**

The land area corresponding to Northeast Ohio played a more prominent role in the Late Woodland Period than in the Early or Middle Woodland. A Late Woodland period site in Northeast Ohio, Greenwood Village, (33Su93) now in the national park, is one of the most important Late Woodland sites in the state. The Late Woodland period occurred in last part of the first in Millennium AD, around the time of the perhaps parallel European "Dark Ages." One possible reason for Woodland cultural decline at this time was scarcity of large game. Trade goods from afar such as obsidian vanished. Mica ceremonialism ceased. Art became simple. Yet in the Late Woodland period advancements in agriculture and technology took place, rendering the period no "dark ages" at all.

Several important changes in applied technology occurred at the end of Late Woodland Period. One was the decline of maygrass in dietary importance. A second was the rise of underground pits for prolonged food storage. Both of these changes in diet resulted in freeing up energy previously used for food procurement.

Another sign of progress in the Late Woodland Period was entrance into Ohio of the bow and arrow. Points launched by bows moved more swiftly and could be sent forth in greater succession than those launched by atlatl, the former chief hunting weapon. This change allowed for greater hunting success. Additionally bow-launched points had greater impact, further maximizing wild game harvesting.

Military and sacred earthworks continued to be erected in the Late Woodland period. Some Late Woodland and Late Prehistoric Period earthworks have remains of log stockades, and thus are considered to be more defensive than the earthworks which preceded them.

**Fort Hill, OH57, North Olmsted, Ohio.** This site, one half mile west of Cleveland Hopkins Airport, overlooks the Rocky River. The site consists of three earthen walls that acted to cordon off a point of land surrounded on the other three sides by water. The walls date to about 800 AD. Since no post-mold holes for any structure were found at the site, it is assumed to be ceremonial, not defensive. There is also evidence at Fort Hill for later use by Whittlesey people.

#### **The Late Prehistoric Period: 900 AD - 1660 AD, and Whittlesey Culture near Cleveland**

The Late Prehistoric period in northern Ohio between the Conneaut River in eastern Ashtabula County and the Black River in Lorain is distinguished by a marked culture that archaeologist Emerson Greenman named the Whittlesey Focus after Charles Whittlesey. Changes in pottery style and a transition to a more sedentary lifestyle characterized the Whittlesey Focus. In some ways the Whittlesey Focus displayed the insularity and isolation of the Late Woodland period. Local flint as opposed to that quarried far away became more popular for points and blades. The Hopewell level of trade was never re-established. Mounds and elaborate burials were rare in the Whittlesey Focus. Yet the Mid-Continental cultural blossoming inspired by Native Mexican developments, and called Mississippian culture, was present in the Whittlesey Focus. Two hallmarks of Mississippian culture seen in Northeast Ohio were rich ceremonialism and continued agricultural advancement.

The flowering of Mississippian culture in Ohio is most associated with the Fort Ancient people near the Ohio River. In turn Fort Ancient civilization spread to the Whittlesey Focus and other cultures further north. Through Fort Ancient culture and the Mississippian influence, beans, originally from Mexico, came to dominate northern Ohio agriculture. Maize, also originally from Mexico, showed improved varieties among Whittlesey people. The Reeve Road site, 33La7, Eastlake, Ohio, east of Cleveland suggests increased tobacco culture; more smoking pipes were recovered there than at any other Ohio prehistoric site excepting the central Ohio Mound City group.



Like Reeve Road, most Whittlesey earthworks and large-scale cultural finds have been to the east and south of Cleveland. One important site, Tuttle Hill, 33Cu7, Independence, Ohio is in an industrial area only two miles south of city limits. This is another of the earthen hilltop enclosures that Charles Whittlesey investigated in the 19th Century. Whittlesey called the site the Ancient Fort #3, Independence. The current name stems from Henry Tuttle, the owner of property in Whittlesey's time. Twentieth Century industrialization totally wiped out the earthworks, the location of which presently is the Cloverleaf Bowling Alley on State Route 21. Whittlesey lamented about the wear from agriculture on the earthwork in his own time, describing the area as "mercilessly cropped."

Tuttle Hill was the site of Emerson's Greenman's 1930 work which identified the Whittlesey Focus. Tuttle Hill also lends its name to a style of pottery which David Brose identified and called Tuttle Hill Notched. This style characterizes much of the pottery in the entire area. Far more of the type was uncovered at larger nearby South Park (33Cu8), Independence. It is a late pottery style, perhaps as recent as 1650 AD, the era of the last of the Whittlesey people. The style (FIGURE 4) shows likely Fort Ancient influence. Despite their late date, and the recovery of well-preserved shell tempered specimens, local Tuttle-Notched pieces do not evince shell-tempering more than the slightly earlier Reeve pottery.

Around 1650 the powerful Iroquois took control of southern Lake Erie in their quest for valuable beaver pelts to trade to

Europeans. The Iroquois reported to missionary writers that they had found near what's now Cleveland a population of less technically advanced Indians who had no knowledge of Europeans. The missionaries also recorded the Iroquois as saying they easily vanquished these predecessors. We can only assume that this Iroquois victory ended Whittlesey culture and Cleveland's rich prehistory.

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Figure 1 (Peskin)  
"Cleveland 1800,"  
1896

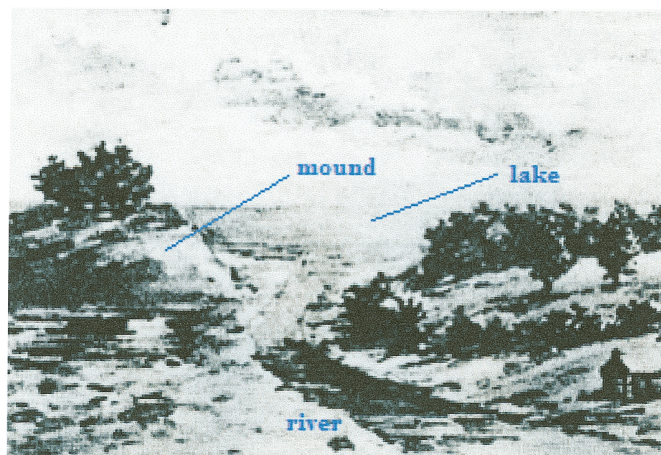


Figure 2 (Peskin) "Ancient Fort  
#2 Newburg," now in Cuyahoga  
Heights (Whittlesey {1871} 59).

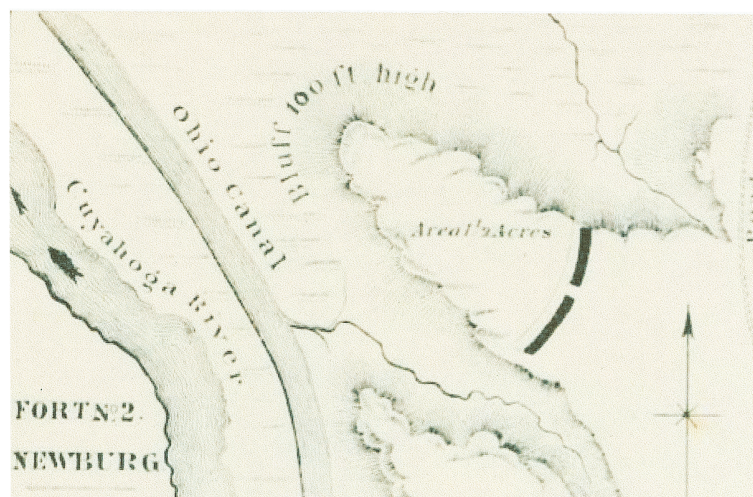


Figure 3 (Peskin) This is Charles  
Whittlesey's cross-sectional  
drawing of the clay tube that  
he removed from the Sawtell  
mound (Whittlesey {1871} 40).

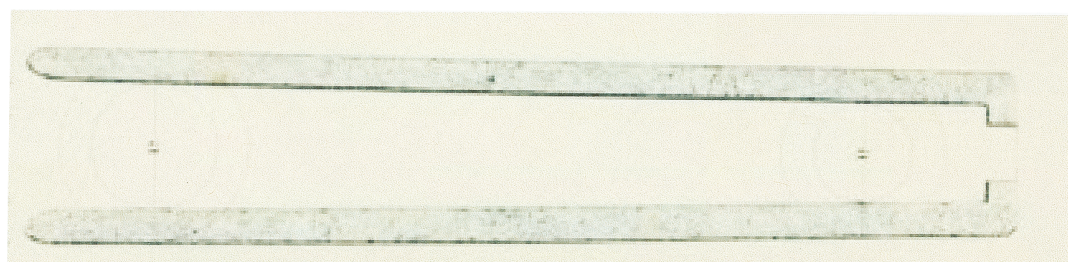


Figure 4 (Peskin) Tuttle-Hill Notched  
pottery shard. (National Park Service,  
Cuyahoga Valley National Park:  
"American Indians – Late Prehistoric",  
[www.nps.gov/cuva](http://www.nps.gov/cuva)).

This bodysherd is highly ornamented.  
The rim may have displayed symmetri-  
cally placed decorations corresponding  
to handle points.

